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ABSTRACT

As California moves to become the only large industrial State with a numerical majority composed of non-whites, the quality of education and institutional expectations for non-white children diminishes. For example, Hispanic students in California are members of the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation and in the State, but, in 1981, 77% of all Hispanic students attending California public schools were underachieving. Compared to white pupils, Hispanic students were twice as likely to repeat grades, drop out, and read below grade level. Moreover, they have limited access to curricular programs which stress college preparation, particularly in the math and science areas. Those able to enroll in college are more likely than Whites to attend two-year institutions as part-time students. In California, only 7% of Hispanics who enter college each year are likely to receive a bachelor's degree. Similar evidence of educational inequity and neglect can be provided for Blacks and American Indians. Among the practices and policies which limit access and lessen the expected outcomes of non-white students are those that: promote monolingualism, suggest the dominant values of society to be superior to others, establish low academic expectations for students based on their social, linguistic, and economic background, view linguistic and cultural differences as deficits and problems to be remediated, and track students for limited career options. Current policies do promote equities of resources, but policies promoting equality of expectations and treatment remain to be developed. Recommendations for practice and policy development are outlined. (KH)

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PROBLEMS OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS OF NON-WHITE ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

Albert Ochoa

In the next 20 years, our society faces a complexity of social, economic, and political equity problems in its attempt to operationalize the basic principles of its Constitution and the belief system that calls for liberty and justice for all.

Despite years of legal and legislative mandates to improve equity of access, of outcome, and of staffing, educational institutions continue to be discriminatory (Allen & Dede, 1979). Specifically, as the State of California moves to become the only large industrial state with a numerical majority composed of non-whites, and as our communities become more culturally diverse in number, the quality of education and of institutional expectations for non-white children diminishes (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978). Fewer students are provided with the necessary skills to enable them to enter college (Arciniega, 1984). The achievement data from the California Assessment Program for 1977-1978, suggest that by the third grade, over 80% of Hispanic and Black students attending California schools are achieving below grade level in reading (Espinosa & Ochoa, 1984, in press). For these students, the chances of attending college are dismal, while they are given even fewer skills to deal with the societal demands of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

More recent data suggest the same educational neglect. In 1982, for every 100 third-grade Hispanic and Black students, 80% are already underachieving in reading and writing (Cervantes, 1982; California Assembly Office of Research, 1984). These are the same children, who if they remain in school and graduate in 1993, will be facing a national economy that requires job market skills in biological engineering, oceanography, computer and electronics, space technology, and business administration--all of which demand high level of language, science, and mathematics skills.

The problem facing non-white students becomes more alarming as we analyze the demographic trends of our state. In 1967, the non-white student population of California was 24.4%; in 1977, it increased to 36.9%; in 1981 it reached 43.6%, and in 1987, it is projected to be 54%. (California State Department of Education, 1981 CBEDS). Given the present state of our educational system, the failure of school and society to educate and to

UD 023 037

integrate students of non-white ethnic backgrounds into the mainstream will increase (Ochoa & Romo, 1977; Carter & MacFadden, 1980).

A case in point: The Hispanic community, is the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation and in California. According to the U.S. Census of 1980, 13.2 million Hispanics reside in the U.S., of which 60% are of Chicano/Mexican background (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980). In California, 82% of the 4.6 million Hispanics are of Chicano/Mexican background. This population of students in California has a high drop-out rate. Forty to fifty percent never complete high school (Carter & Segura, 1979; Rumberger, 1981; Arias, 1984). Other statistical data indicate that major cities in the United States with large numbers of Hispanics, also have significant drop-out rates--New York 80%, Chicago 70%, Miami 32%, and San Antonio 23% (National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics, 1984).

The number of Hispanic students attending public school in California in 1981 was 1,045,000 of which 77% are underachieving (California State Department of Education, 1981 CBEDS). Their educational profile is grim:

- Twice as many Hispanic pupils as White pupils repeat grades.
- Three times as many Hispanic pupils as White pupils are above the average age of their classmates.
- Twice as many Hispanic pupils as White pupils drop out of school.
- Twice as many Hispanic pupils as White pupils read below grade level.
- The attrition rate of Hispanic pupils is about twice that of White pupils.

Furthermore, Hispanic students lag about four years behind the national underachievement norms (Brown, G.H., Rosen, N.L., Hill, S.T., & Olivas, M.A., 1980). The underachievement of Hispanic students prevails at all grade levels, when compared to Whites in the skill areas of mathematics, reading, and vocabulary (Nielsen & Fernandez, 1981). For Chicano/Hispanic students who are limited English proficient, the language minority status is a strong predictor of grade retention, and grade retention is a predictor of dropping out.

These are the students who often do not develop good reading skills and who do not perform as well on achievement tests, since tests are generally administered in English (Arias, 1984). Early academic underachievement and under-enrollment contribute to the devastating school attrition rates of Hispanic students. The response of schools to underachievement leads to curriculum tracks characterized by a climate of low academic expectations for these students. An additional factor which reinforces these low academic expectations is the low economic status of a large percentage of these families. For every White household with income below the poverty line, there are 3.11 Black and 3.12 Hispanic households (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978).

Hispanic students have limited access to curricular programs which stress college preparation, particularly in the math and science areas. By eighth grade, the majority of these students are channeled away from college preparatory courses (National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics, 1984). Access to computer literacy courses now requires beginning Algebra as a prerequisite, a requirement that will further exclude students from access to computer training (Arias, 1984). Thus, by the time Chicano/Mexican students reach high school, they have low academic expectations because of inappropriate tracking decisions, instruction in a language incomprehensible to them, an inadequate variety of educational options, and few extracurricular opportunities. Additionally, these students face an unattractive school facility which is overpopulated, under-staffed, and which has no resources to implement motivational programs for them (Carter & MacFadden, 1980; Arias, 1984).

Those that survive high school and graduate, and who are able to enroll in college, are more

likely than Whites to attend two-year institutions as part-time students. Furthermore, entrance into college does not indicate readiness to meet the academic demands (Brown et al., 1980). In 1980, only 14% of all first-time freshmen in California were Hispanic (California Post-Secondary Commission, 1982). Fewer than half of them completed their program. In California, only 7% of Hispanics who enter college each year are likely to receive a bachelor's degree, (Commission on Higher Education of Minorities, 1982). The same educational neglect can be documented for Blacks, and American Indians. (California Postsecondary Commission, 1982). Given the present demographic trends, there is an alarming need to address the underachievement of at least 70% of the non-white students. The academic areas of need are reading, language arts, mathematics, and science. While the need is clear, defining the instructional and institutional interventions and the circumstances and conditions for these interventions is the challenge facing educators.

Conditions Restraining Educational Access and Benefits

Our educational and social institutions must examine and redefine existing policy and practices that negate full access, benefits and expected outcomes to non-white students, and in particular to Chicano/Mexican students. Among these policies and practices, are those that promote English language monolingualism, that suggest the dominant values of society to be superior to others (Suzuki, 1982; Persell, 1977), that establish low academic expectations for students based on their social, linguistic and economic background (Carter and Segura, 1979), that view linguistic and cultural differences as deficits and as problems to be remediated (Ochoa, 1982), and that track students for limited career options (Mercer, 1980).

The implications of these policies and practices are well-documented. A nation that promotes monolingualism in a world economy that requires multilingual competence is a society in decline (Naisbett, 1982). An educational system that supports assimilationist values is a system that negates the cultural pluralism of our society and world (Suzuki, 1982). A society that predetermines the academic potential of students based on family income, place of residence, home language, and parents' occupation, is a society that promotes status ranking based on race, color and socioeconomic condition (Persell, 1977). A school community that perceives students from non-white, non-English speaking ethnic groups as not reflecting the preferred values of society, is a community that commissions ethnocentrism and sociocultural myopia (Pantoja, 1975). A school system that uses norm testing to determine, as early as the third grade, which students should participate in the college preparatory curricula and which should receive the remedial or minimal (basic) curricula, is a system that blocks the economic and social potential of our future human resources (Cervantes, 1982).

Towards Equal Educational Practices

Quality education is achieved when all students are provided with equal access to resources, when these resources are translated to equal expectations, when equal expectations are transformed to equal treatment, and when equal treatment yields academic outcomes that enable students to not only attend college, but graduate with a college degree in numbers which proportionally reflect the ethnic diversity of our population. Current policies promote equal access of resources and a tolerance towards linguistic and cultural differences, yet legislation describes the non-white student as "disadvantaged", "linguistically deficit", and "economically deprived".

In order for school districts to move from the equal access of resources stage to the equal expectations and equal treatment stages, the schools must promote educational practices that:

- View the background experiences of the student not as deficits but as experiences to be used to develop concepts, literacy and critical thinking skills.

- Use testing and diagnostic assessment approaches as tools for identifying the strengths and cognitive needs of students--in order to enrich their cognitive skills and to develop their intellect.

- Recognize that students learn at different rates, through different approaches and with different learning styles.

- Provide different types of curriculum programs, while maintaining the same standards, core curricula and expectations, to address the wide range of academic and linguistic development of students.

- Produce credentialed staff, trained to meet the diverse academic and linguistic learning needs of students.

- Hold school personnel and leadership accountable for effective educational practices that yield academic achievement at grade level proficiency for all students.

- Employ accountability systems that monitor short and long term student achievement.

- Reach out to communities to involve parents with students and school personnel, in defining needs and developing programs that yield effective, and relevant school programs.

Policy Recommendations

These policies must be included in the guiding principles of any school system committed to equal educational access, benefits and career outcomes:

- Educational curricula must support the exploration of alternative and emerging life styles that prepares youth to cope with the world of work and the society of the 21st Century.

- Educational curricula must advance the development of multi-cultural values and multilingual competency to prepare youth to communicate effectively in a world community.

- Educational curricula, and the school personnel who use them must recognize and support cultural and linguistic uniqueness in order to develop youth who are socially literate and who can assume responsibility for maintaining democratic principles.

- The organizational structure of schools must provide trained, competent and credentialed personnel that guide youth to achieve academically and to attain the necessary skills to enter institutions of higher education and an unlimited range of careers.

In the face of egalitarian ideology, and practices which persist in the educational, economic, and political inequality among different segments of society, we need to reexamine social policy and educational practices (Ogbu, 1978). We also face the need to reexamine our own values and their implications for the nature of our social, economic, political, and educational institutions. Our search for answers and solutions to the problems facing our culturally and linguistically diverse society will have profound implications within and across all societal sectors, both structurally and ideologically. We must advocate sound and effective educational programs for all students. We have the right and the obligation to intervene on behalf of our youth in order to transform their social, economic, and political realities into equal educational access, benefits and outcomes.

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